

Where are they now?

Tech authors reinvent themselves

CHARLES MANDEL

When the technology bubble burst and took the computer-book market with it, it didn't just affect publishers and booksellers — authors were hit too. For Canadian tech gurus who made their names with computer and Internet titles, the crash looked like bad news.

As it turns out, there is life after the boom. But some authors who could at one time count on a steady stream of revenue from computer-curious readers have had to reinvent themselves.

Take Rick Broadhead. Along with his co-author, Jim Carroll, he wrote several Internet guides, the best-known of which was *The Canadian Internet Handbook*, a regularly updated volume that sold 50,000 copies and topped bestseller lists. "The type of

book I wrote 10 years ago, the market would not support [today]," admits Broadhead. When dot-com firms dominated the stock market, people scrambled to understand every aspect of the Internet, e-commerce and business, Broadhead says. Books covered topics such as launching an initial public offering, how to start an Internet company, and how to become an entrepreneur, along with a wave of general interest about what the Internet was and how to get onto it. But as the Internet became more ubiquitous, people needed fewer general books on how to get online, and as Internet firms failed, books by dot-com executives fell out of favour.



Rick Broadhead

While Broadhead hasn't entirely given up writing in the field — he has a new book on technology mishaps titled *Dear Valued Customer: You're a Loser* (Andrews McMeel/Canadian Manda) — he is also concentrating on his new venture as a literary agent. In the last year, he's taken on some 20 clients in various non-fiction categories. His recent sales include *The Full Flavour Diet*, to be published by Rodale and written by Dr. David Katz, and *Toy Tips*, to be published by Josey Bass and written by Marianne Szymanski, former toy expert on *Good Morning America*. Broadhead is further hedging his bets with another non-technology title of his own, a book on politics titled *The Little Book of Canadian Political Wisdom* (a collaboration with Andy Donato), published by Key Porter Books this fall.

Broadhead's former co-author, Jim Carroll, is more pessimistic about the collapse of the Internet book market. "I

don't think it declined. I think it died. A lot of people have concluded the Internet isn't terribly important to their lives or their business, which is absolutely



Jim Carroll

ludicrous, but that's what happened when they lost their shirts in the stock market." Carroll calls the category a phase that passed and believes publishers lost interest in trying to spark dying sales. And so he switched focus, concentrating on future trends and innovations and devoting less time to writing. He now travels North America and Europe, speaking and consulting on future trends in health care, broadcasting, and other sectors. Back home in Canada, however, Carroll says everyone still remembers him as the guy who wrote *The Canadian Internet Handbook*. "It's like, Deep Purple did 'Smoke on the Water' and everybody remembered them for that. It's a terrible battle to fight back against."

Not that he's given up writing altogether. Carroll's new book on trends is titled *What I Learned from Frogs in Texas: How to Achieve Transformative Innovation in a Time of Constant Change*. The publisher? Carroll himself. Why? He says conventional publishing cycles take too long to bring books to market, exacerbating their already shortened life cycles. "I'm talking here about the rates of change and innovation. I don't have the luxury of time for some slow-moving publisher who takes a year to get a book to market."

Ask Paul Hoffert about the tech and computer book category and he, too, says he doesn't see its return any time soon. The author of two well-regarded books on technology, *The Bagel Effect* and *Altogether Now*, Hoffert says the tech crash had "an enormous impact on steering my career." His third book, *The New Client*, was more of a general business book. Berklee Press in the U.S. is publishing a new Hoffert book on technology this year, but it's a textbook, not a trade release.

Hoffert's speaking engagements suffered as well — at least, when it came to technology. He went from talking as often as two or three times daily to more sporadically. "In my view, the so-called bubble won't return," he says, "and everybody has to adjust or not as they want. The way I adjusted is that my books serving the mass market are more aimed at business and social changes and less focused on the actual technology." □